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Topics

Return to the Gulag

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn has done more than expose the horrors of the Soviet penal system. He has used royalties from "The Gulag Archipelago" to help new victims of repression by creating a fund that for a decade has operated from Switzerland.

Now, in a sinister turn, Soviet managers of the Solzhenitsyn Fund are being charged by state prosecutors with high treason.

Though the K.G.B. has harassed the fund's managers and recipients of its help, this is the first time anyone involved has faced a death penalty.

A former journalist, Valery Repin, contends that his work as Leningrad manager of the fund turned him into a "thoughtless pawn" of the C.I.A. If he had refused to confess in a recent and protracted show trial, he risked death for treason, instead of six or seven years in prison.

So one can guess the courage of the fund's Moscow manager, Sergei Khodorovich, who reportedly resisted confession despite two months in prison.

Though the fund's work is necessarily discreet, it has over the years helped more than a thousand families. Its revenues average \$120,000 a year. That is a trickle of assistance for victims who usually lose jobs when accused of crimes of conscience and face jail or confinement to "psychiatric" hospitals.

The crackdown signals the K.G.B.'s determination to make a closed society hermetic. If the security agency's former boss wants to prove he is still a cop at heart, Yuri Andropov is succeeding.